

What is claimed is:

CLAIMS

1 1. A tray retainer for holding a tray stack having a plurality of trays that
2 are configured to carry microelectronic devices, comprising:

3 a guide structure having a first region, a second region spaced apart from
4 the first region, a first channel section extending in a direction of a load/unload path
5 between the first and second regions, and a second channel section extending in the
6 direction of the load/unload path between the first and second regions, the second channel
7 section facing the first channel section;

8 a cross-member extending transverse to the load/unload path and at least
9 partially across the first region of the guide structure between the first and second channel
10 sections; and

11 a moveable retaining element positioned at the second region of the guide
12 structure, the retaining element being moveable to a storage position in which the
13 retaining element projects a first distance transverse to the load/unload path into the guide
14 structure, and the retaining element being moveable to a load/unload position in which
15 the retaining element either does not project into the retaining assembly or projects a
16 second distance less than the first distance.

1 2. The tray retainer of claim 1 wherein:

2 the guide structure comprises a frame having a bearing plate with a first end
3 and a second end, a plurality of elongated L-shaped channel members attached to the first
4 and second ends of the bearing plate, and panels attached to the channel members and/or
5 the bearing plate, the channel members including first and second channel members
6 attached to the first end of the bearing plate defining the first channel section and third
7 and fourth channel members attached to the second end of the bearing plate defining the
8 second channel section, wherein the channel members project from the bearing plate in
9 the direction of the load/unload path, and wherein the first channel member faces the
10 third channel member and the second channel member faces the fourth channel member;

the tray retainer further includes a lock/release mechanism coupled to the guide structure, the cross-member and the retaining element, the lock/release mechanism including at least one shaft coupled to the retaining element, an actuator coupled to the shaft, and a lock bearing coupled to the cross-member, the shaft having a sleeve with a contact portion, a bore and a slot, and the shaft also having a through-pin slidably received in the bore of the sleeve, and the shaft further having a key attached to the through-pin and received slot of the sleeve, the key rotating the sleeve with rotation of the through-pin, the actuator having a pulley attached to one end of the through pin, a drive cylinder and a belt engaging the drive cylinder and the pulley, and the lock bearing having a resilient engagement member to selectively engage the contact portion of the sleeve, wherein an operator rotates the drive shaft to rotate the through-pin, sleeve and retaining element between the storage position and the load/unload position; and the cross-member comprises a moveable plate.

3. The tray retainer of claim 1 wherein the guide structure comprises a frame having a bearing plate with a first end and a second end, a plurality of elongated L-shaped channel members attached to the first and second ends of the bearing plate, and panels attached to the channel members and/or the bearing plate, the channel members including first and second channel members attached to the first end of the bearing plate defining the first channel section and third and fourth channel members attached to the second end of the bearing plate defining the second channel section, wherein the channel members project from the bearing plate in the direction of the load/unload path, and the first channel member faces the third channel member and the second channel member faces the fourth channel member.

4. The tray retainer of claim 1 wherein:
the first channel section comprises a first C-shaped channel member, and
the second channel section comprises a second C-shaped channel member; and

4 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
5 C-shaped channel member and a second end attached to the second C-shaped channel
6 member.

1 5. The tray retainer of claim 1 wherein:
2 the first channel section comprises a first C-shaped channel member, and
3 the second channel section comprises a second C-shaped channel member;
4 the cross-member comprises a floating plate extending at least partially
5 between the first C-shaped channel member and the second C-shaped channel member,
6 the floating plate being moveable along the load/unload path; and
7 the retaining element comprises a tab projecting into a cavity between the
8 first and second C-shaped channel members in the storage position.

1 6. The tray retainer of claim 1 wherein:
2 the first channel section comprises first and second L-shaped channel
3 members, and the second channel section comprises third and fourth L-shaped channel
4 members; and
5 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
6 and second L-shaped channel members and a second end attached to the third and fourth
7 L-shaped channel members.

1 7. The tray retainer of claim 1 wherein:
2 the first channel section comprises first and second L-shaped channel
3 members, and the second channel section comprises third and fourth L-shaped channel
4 members;
5 the cross-member comprises a floating plate extending at least partially
6 between the first L-shaped channel member, the second L-shaped channel member, the
7 third L-shaped channel member, and the fourth L-shaped channel member, the floating
8 plate being moveable along the load/unload path; and

9 the retaining element comprises a tab projecting into a cavity between the
10 first and second L-shaped channel members in the storage position.

1 8. The tray retainer of claim 1 wherein:
2 the guide structure comprises a unitary shell, and the first channel section is
3 defined by a first end of the shell and the second channel section is defined by a second
4 end of the shell; and
5 the cross-member comprises a plate attached to the shell.

1 9. The tray retainer of claim 1, further comprising a lock/release
2 mechanism having an actuator, a shaft having a first end coupled to the retaining element
3 and a second end coupled to the actuator, and a lock bearing attached to the cross-
4 member and slidably receiving the shaft, the actuator rotating to rotate the retaining
5 element between the storage position and the load/unload position and to rotate the shaft
6 between a lock position and a release position relative to the lock bearing, the lock
7 bearing preventing the cross-member from moving along the shaft when the shaft is in the
8 lock position and the retaining element is in the storage position, and the lock bearing
9 allowing the cross-member to move along the shaft when the shaft is in the release
10 position and the retaining element is in the load/unload position.

1 10. The tray retainer of claim 1, further comprising a lock/release
2 mechanism having an actuator and a shaft coupled to the actuator, the actuator having a
3 drive cylinder and a belt contacting the drive cylinder, and the shaft having a through-pin
4 including a first end coupled to the belt and a second end attached to the retaining
5 element, a key attached to the through-pin proximate to the second end, and a sleeve
6 having a bore receiving the through-pin and a slot receiving the key, wherein rotation of
7 the drive cylinder rotates the through-pin and the sleeve to move the shaft between a lock
8 position in which the retaining element is in the storage position and a release position in
9 which the retaining element is in the load/unload position.

1 11. The tray retainer of claim 1 wherein:
2 the guide structure comprises a frame having a bearing plate and a plurality
3 of channel members including at least a first channel member projecting from one end of
4 the bearing plate and a second channel member projecting from another end of the
5 bearing plate, the first channel member defining the first channel section of the guide
6 structure and the second channel member defining the second channel section of the
7 guide structure;
8 the retaining element comprises a tab; and
9 the tray retainer further comprising a lock/release mechanism having an
10 actuator, a shaft coupled to the actuator, and a lock bearing slidably receiving the shaft
11 and attached to the cross-member, wherein movement of the actuator to a first position
12 moves shaft to a lock position in which the lock bearing engages the shaft to prevent the
13 cross-member from moving along the shaft and in which the tab projects into a space
14 between the first and second channel members in the storage position, and wherein
15 movement of the actuator to a second position moves the shaft to a release position in
16 which lock bearing disengages the shaft to allow the cross-member to move along the
17 shaft and in which the tab is at least partially removed from the space between the first
18 and second channel members in the load/unload position.

1 12. The tray retainer of claim 1, further comprising a lock/release
2 assembly including:
3 a lock bearing attached to the cross-member, the lock bearing having a hole;
4 a shaft extending in the direction of the load/unload path, the shaft being
5 slidably and rotatably received in the hole of the lock bearing, wherein at least one of the
6 lock bearing and the shaft rotates between a lock position and a release position; and
7 an engagement assembly having an engagement element, a contact surface
8 and a release surface, the engagement element being coupled to one of the shaft or the
9 lock bearing, and the contact surface and the release surface being on the other of the
10 shaft or the lock bearing, the contact surface being configured to contact the engagement

11 element and prevent axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the lock
12 position, and the release surface being configured to be spaced apart from the engagement
13 element and allow axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the release
14 position.

1 13. The tray retainer of claim 12 wherein:

2 the shaft comprises a contoured elongated member having a flat section
3 defining the release surface and a rounded outer section defining the contact surface, the
4 rounded outer section having a curved outer surface with a diameter to fit within the hole
5 of the lock bearing; and

6 the lock bearing comprises a hub having a cylindrical hole, an interior
7 groove with in the hole, and a resilient member defining the engagement member in the
8 groove, the flat section being juxtaposed to the resilient member in the release position
9 and the outer section contacting the resilient member in the lock position.

1 14. The tray retainer of claim 12 wherein:

2 the shaft comprises an elongated member having a flat section defining the
3 release surface and a plurality of truncated annular teeth defining the contact surface; and

4 the lock bearing comprises a hub having a cylindrical hole, a flat portion,
5 and a slot in the flat portion defining the engagement element, the flat section of the shaft
6 being juxtaposed to the flat portion of the lock bearing in the release position and at least
7 one of the annular teeth being in the slot in the lock position.

1 15. A retainer for holding a tray stack having a plurality of trays
2 configured to carry a plurality of microelectronic devices, comprising:

3 a casing having a guide structure with a first end, a second end, an interior
4 holding area, and an opening at the second end of the guide structure for receiving the
5 trays, the guide structure being configured to receive the tray stack and allow the tray
6 stack to move along a load/unload path through the guide structure;

7 a cross-member member extending across at least a portion of the casing
8 transverse to the load/unload path, the cross-member being spaced apart from the second
9 end of the casing; and

10 a plurality of moveable retaining elements at least proximate to the second
11 end, the retaining elements being moveable between a storage position in which the
12 retaining elements project into the interior holding area of the guide structure to obstruct
13 the load/unload path, and the retaining elements being moveable into a load/unload
14 position in which the retaining elements are clear the load/unload path.

1 16. The retainer of claim 15 wherein:
2 the guide structure has a first channel section comprising a first C-shaped
3 channel member and a second channel section comprising second C-shaped channel
4 member; and

5 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
6 C-shaped channel member and a second end attached to the second C-shaped channel
7 member.

8 17. The retainer of claim 15 wherein:
9 the guide structure has a first channel section comprising a first C-shaped
10 channel member and a second channel section comprising a second C-shaped channel
11 member;

12 the cross-member comprises a floating plate extending at least partially
13 between the first C-shaped channel member and the second C-shaped channel member,
14 the floating plate being moveable along the load/unload path; and

15 the retaining element comprises a tab projecting into a cavity between the
16 first and second C-shaped channel members in the storage position.

1 18. The retainer of claim 15 wherein:

2 the guide structure has a first channel section comprising first and second
3 L-shaped channel members and a second channel section comprising third and fourth L-
4 shaped channel members; and

5 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
6 and second L-shaped channel members and a second end attached to the third and fourth
7 L-shaped channel members.

1 19. The retainer of claim 15 wherein:

2 the guide structure has a first channel section comprising first and second
3 L-shaped channel members and a second channel section comprising third and fourth L-
4 shaped channel members;

5 the cross-member comprises a floating plate extending at least partially
6 between the first L-shaped channel member, the second L-shaped channel member, the
7 third L-shaped channel member, and the fourth L-shaped channel member, the floating
8 plate being moveable along the load/unload path; and

9 the retaining element comprises a tab projecting into a cavity between the
10 first and second L-shaped channel members in the storage position.

1 20. The retainer of claim 15, further comprising a lock/release assembly
2 including:

3 a lock bearing attached to the cross-member, the lock bearing having a hole;
4 a shaft extending in the direction of the load/unload path, the shaft being
5 slidably and rotatably received in the hole of the lock bearing, wherein at least one of the
6 lock bearing and the shaft rotates between a lock position and a release position; and

7 an engagement assembly having an engagement element, a contact surface
8 and a release surface, the engagement element being coupled to one of the shaft or the
9 lock bearing, and the contact surface and the release surface being on the other of the
10 shaft or the lock bearing, the contact surface being configured to contact the engagement

11 element and prevent axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the lock
12 position, and the release surface being configured to be spaced apart from the engagement
13 element and allow axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the release
14 position.

1 21. A retainer for holding a tray stack having a plurality of trays that are
2 configured to carry microelectronic devices, comprising:

3 a protective casing including a guide structure having a first guide section
4 configured to receive a first side of the tray stack, a second guide section configured to
5 receive a second side of the tray stack, the first and second guide sections defining an
6 opening and an interior holding area configured to retain the tray stack in a stacked
7 arrangement and to allow the tray stack to move through the guide structure;

8 a cross-member extending at least partially between the first and second
9 guides sections; and

10 a plurality of moveable retaining elements in the casing at least proximate
11 to the opening, the retaining elements being moveable between a storage position in
12 which the retaining elements project into the opening and a load/unload position in which
13 the retaining elements either do not project as far into the opening or are completely
14 removed from the opening.

1 22. The retainer of claim 21 wherein:

2 the first channel section comprises a first C-shaped channel member, and
3 the second channel section comprises a second C-shaped channel member; and

4 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
5 C-shaped channel member and a second end attached to the second C-shaped channel
6 member.

1 23. The retainer of claim 21 wherein:

2 the first channel section comprises first and second L-shaped channel
3 members, and the second channel section comprises third and fourth L-shaped channel
4 members; and

5 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
6 and second L-shaped channel members and a second end attached to the third and fourth
7 L-shaped channel members.

1 24. The retainer of claim 21, further comprising a lock/release assembly
2 including:

3 a lock bearing attached to the cross-member, the lock bearing having a hole;
4 a shaft extending in the direction of the load/unload path, the shaft being
5 slidably and rotatably received in the hole of the lock bearing, wherein at least one of the
6 lock bearing and the shaft rotates between a lock position and a release position; and

7 an engagement assembly having an engagement element, a contact surface
8 and a release surface, the engagement element being coupled to one of the shaft or the
9 lock bearing, and the contact surface and the release surface being on the other of the
10 shaft or the lock bearing, the contact surface being configured to contact the engagement
11 element and prevent axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the lock
12 position, and the release surface being configured to be spaced apart from the engagement
13 element and allow axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the release
14 position.

1 25. A retainer for holding a tray stack having a plurality of trays that are
2 configured to carry microelectronic devices, comprising:

3 a housing having a frame and a plurality of panels attached to the frame, the
4 frame including a first guide having an interior structure configured to moveably retain a
5 first side of the tray stack, a second guide having an inner structure configured to
6 moveably retain a second side of the tray stack, a bearing plate attached to an upper

7 section of the first and second guides to fix together the first and second guides, the
8 panels being attached to the frame to define a cavity configured to receive the tray stack,
9 and the panels defining an opening to the cavity opposite of the bearing plate through
10 which the tray stack can pass into or out of the housing;

11 a quick release lock assembly coupled to the housing, the lock assembly
12 having an actuator, a plurality of shafts coupled to the actuator and positioned in the
13 housing to move between a first position and second position, and a retaining element
14 attached to an end of each shaft at least proximate to the opening of the housing, the
15 retaining elements moving with the shafts between a storage position when the shafts are
16 in the first position and a load/unload position when the shafts are in the second position,
17 wherein the retaining elements at least partially obstruct the opening in the storage
18 position to hold trays of the tray stack in the housing, and the retaining elements do not
19 obstruct the opening in the load/unload position to allow individual trays to pass through
20 the opening; and

21 a floating plate slidably attached to the shafts, the floating plate driving the
22 trays towards the opening when the retaining elements are in the load/unload position.

26. The retainer of claim 25 wherein the quick release lock assembly
2 further comprises a plurality of lock bearings attached to the floating plate, the lock
3 bearings each having a hole, and wherein the shafts extend in the direction of the
4 load/unload path and each shaft is slidably and rotatably received in a hole of a
5 corresponding lock bearing, wherein at least one of the lock bearings and the shafts rotate
6 between a lock position and a release position.

1 27. The retainer of claim 26 wherein the lock bearing each further
2 comprise an engagement assembly having an engagement element, a contact surface and a
3 release surface, the engagement element being coupled to one of the shafts or the lock
4 bearings, and the contact surface and the release surface being on the other of the shafts
5 or the lock bearings.

1 28. The retainer of claim 27 wherein the contact surface is configured to
2 contact the engagement element and prevent axial movement between the lock bearing
3 and the shaft in the lock position, and the release surface is configured to be spaced apart
4 from the engagement element and allow axial movement between the lock bearing and
5 the shaft in the release position.

1 29. The retainer of claim 28 wherein:
2 the shafts each comprise a contoured elongated member having a flat
3 section defining the release surface and a rounded outer section defining the contact
4 surface, the rounded outer section having a curved outer surface with a diameter to fit
5 within the hole of a corresponding lock bearing; and

6 the lock bearings each comprise a hub having a cylindrical hole, an interior
7 groove within the hole, and a resilient member defining the engagement member in the
8 groove, the flat section of a shaft being juxtaposed to the resilient member of a
9 corresponding lock bearing in the release position and the outer section of the shaft
10 contacting the resilient member of the corresponding lock bearing in the lock position.

1 30. The retainer of claim 28 wherein:
2 the shafts each comprise an elongated member having a flat section defining
3 the release surface and a plurality of truncated annular teeth defining the contact surface;
4 and

5 the lock bearings each comprise a hub having a hole, a flat portion, and a
6 slot in the flat portion defining the engagement element, the flat section of a shaft being
7 juxtaposed to the flat portion of a corresponding lock bearing in the release position and
8 at least one of the annular teeth being in the slot in the lock position.

1 31. A retainer for holding a tray stack having a plurality of trays that are
2 configured to carry microelectronic devices, comprising:

3 a casing having a guide structure with a first end and a second end, an
4 interior holding area, and an opening at least proximate to the second end, the guide
5 structure being configured to support the tray stack with respect to a load/unload path and
6 to allow the tray stack to move through the guide structure along the load/unload path;

7 a plurality of moveable retaining elements at least proximate to the second
8 end, the retaining elements being moveable between a storage position in which the
9 retaining elements project into the interior holding area of the guide structure and a
10 load/unload position in which the retaining elements either do not project as far into the
11 interior holding area or are completely removed from the interior holding area; and

12 a floating plate moveably positioned in the casing to move along the
13 load/unload path defined by the guide structure, the floating plate pushing the trays
14 against the retaining elements when the retaining elements are in the storage position and
15 the floating plate pushing the trays out of the casing when the retaining elements are in
16 the load/unload position.

1 32. The retainer of claim 31 wherein:

2 the guide structure has a first channel section comprising a first C-shaped
3 channel member and a second channel section comprising second C-shaped channel
4 member; and

5 the floating plate has a first end adjacent to the first C-shaped channel
6 member and a second end adjacent to the second C-shaped channel member.

1 33. The retainer of claim 31 wherein:

2 the guide structure has a first channel section comprising first and second
3 L-shaped channel members and a second channel section comprising third and fourth L-
4 shaped channel members; and

5 the floating plate has a first end adjacent to the first and second L-shaped
6 channel members and a second end adjacent to the third and fourth L-shaped channel
7 members.

1 34. The retainer of claim 31, further comprising a lock/release assembly
2 including:

3 a lock bearing attached to the floating plate, the lock bearing having a hole;
4 a shaft extending in the direction of the load/unload path, the shaft being
5 slidably and rotatably received in the hole of the lock bearing, wherein at least one of the
6 lock bearing and the shaft rotates between a lock position and a release position; and

7 an engagement assembly having an engagement element, a contact surface
8 and a release surface, the engagement element being coupled to one of the shaft or the
9 lock bearing, and the contact surface and the release surface being on the other of the
10 shaft or the lock bearing, the contact surface being configured to contact the engagement
11 element and prevent axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the lock
position, and the release surface being configured to be spaced apart from the engagement
element and allow axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the release
position.

1 35. A machine for processing microelectronic devices, comprising:
2 a receiving station having a platform with a tray singulator and a mounting
3 element;

4 a removable tray retainer configured to hold a tray stack, the tray retainer
5 having a guide structure including a first guide section and a second guide section, a
6 cross-member extending at least partially between and transverse to the first and second
7 guide sections, and a moveable retaining element spaced apart from the cross-member,
8 the retaining element being moveable between a storage position in which the retaining
9 element obstructs a load/unload path through the guide structure and a load/unload
10 position in which the retaining element does not obstruct the load/unload path and also
11 engages the mounting element to releasably hold the cassette to the platform; and

12 a processing station that processes the microelectronic devices.

1 36. The machine of claim 35 wherein the guide structure comprises a
2 frame having a bearing plate with a first end and a second end, a plurality of elongated L-
3 shaped channel members attached to the first and second ends of the bearing plate, and
4 panels attached to the channel members and/or the bearing plate, the channel members
5 including first and second channel members attached to the first end of the bearing plate
6 defining the first channel section and third and fourth channel members attached to the
7 second end of the bearing plate defining the second channel section, wherein the channel
8 members project from the bearing plate in the direction of the load/unload path, and the
9 first channel member faces the third channel member and the second channel member
10 faces the fourth channel member.

11 37. The machine of claim 35 wherein:
12 the first channel section comprises a first C-shaped channel member, and
1 the second channel section comprises a second C-shaped channel member; and
2 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
3 C-shaped channel member and a second end attached to the second C-shaped channel
4 member.
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1 38. The machine of claim 35 wherein:
2 the first channel section comprises a first C-shaped channel member, and
3 the second channel section comprises a second C-shaped channel member;
4 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
5 C-shaped channel member and a second end attached to the second C-shaped channel
6 member; and
7 the retaining element comprises a tab projecting into a cavity between the
8 first and second C-shaped channel members in the storage position.

1 39. The machine of claim 35 wherein:
2 the first channel section comprises first and second L-shaped channel
3 members, and the second channel section comprises third and fourth L-shaped channel
4 members; and
5 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
6 and second L-shaped channel members and a second end attached to the third and fourth
7 L-shaped channel members.

1 40. The machine of claim 35 wherein:
2 the first channel section comprises first and second L-shaped channel
3 members, and the second channel section comprises third and fourth L-shaped channel
4 members;
5 the cross-member comprises a plate having a first end attached to the first
6 and second L-shaped channel members and a second end attached to the third and fourth
7 L-shaped channel members; and
8 the retaining element comprises a tab projecting into a cavity between the
9 first and second L-shaped channel members in the storage position.

1 41. The machine of claim 35 wherein:
2 the guide structure comprises a unitary shell, and the first channel section is
3 defined by a first end of the shell and the second channel section is defined by a second
4 end of the shell; and
5 the cross-member comprises a plate attached to the shell.

1 42. The machine of claim 35, further comprising a lock/release
2 mechanism having an actuator, a shaft having a first end coupled to the retaining element
3 and a second end coupled to the actuator, and a lock bearing attached to the cross-
4 member and slidably receiving the shaft, the actuator rotating to rotate the retaining
5 element between the storage position and the load/unload position and to rotate the shaft

6 between a lock position and a release position relative to the lock bearing, the lock
7 bearing preventing the cross-member from moving along the shaft when the shaft is in the
8 lock position and the retaining element is in the storage position, and the lock bearing
9 allowing the cross-member to move along the shaft when the shaft is in the release
10 position and the retaining element is in the load/unload position.

1 43. The machine of claim 35, further comprising a lock/release
2 mechanism having an actuator and a shaft coupled to the actuator, the actuator having a
3 drive cylinder and a belt contacting the drive cylinder, and the shaft having a through-pin
4 including a first end coupled to the belt and a second end attached to the retaining
5 element, a key attached to the through-pin proximate to the second end, and a sleeve
6 having a bore receiving the through-pin and a slot receiving the key, wherein rotation of
7 the drive cylinder rotates the through-pin and the sleeve to move the shaft between a lock
8 position in which the retaining element is in the storage position and a release position in
9 which the retaining element is in the load/unload position.

1 44. The machine of claim 35 wherein:
2 the guide structure comprises a frame having a bearing plate and a plurality
3 of channel members including at least a first channel member projecting from one end of
4 the bearing plate and a second channel member projecting from another end of the
5 bearing plate, the first channel member defining the first channel section of the guide
6 structure and the second channel member defining the second channel section of the
7 guide structure;

8 the retaining element comprises a tab; and
9 the tray retainer further comprising a lock/release mechanism having an
10 actuator, a shaft coupled to the actuator, and a lock bearing slidably receiving the shaft
11 and attached to the cross-member, wherein movement of the actuator to a first position
12 moves shaft to a lock position in which the lock bearing engages the shaft to prevent the
13 cross-member from moving along the shaft and in which the tab projects into a space
14 between the first and second channel members in the storage position, and wherein

15 movement of the actuator to a second position moves the shaft to a release position in
16 which lock bearing disengages the shaft to allow the cross-member to move along the
17 shaft and in which the tab is at least partially removed from the space between the first
18 and second channel members in the load/unload position.

1 45. The machine of claim 35, further comprising a lock/release assembly
2 including:

3 a lock bearing attached to the cross-member, the lock bearing having a hole;
4 a shaft extending in the direction of the load/unload path, the shaft being
5 slidably and rotatably received in the hole of the lock bearing, wherein at least one of the
6 lock bearing and the shaft rotates between a lock position and a release position; and

7 an engagement assembly having an engagement element, a contact surface
8 and a release surface, the engagement element being coupled to one of the shaft or the
9 lock bearing, and the contact surface and the release surface being on the other of the
10 shaft or the lock bearing, the contact surface being configured to contact the engagement
11 element and prevent axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the lock
12 position, and the release surface being configured to be spaced apart from the engagement
13 element and allow axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the release
14 position.

1 46. The machine of claim 45 wherein:

2 the shaft comprises a contoured elongated member having a flat section
3 defining the release surface and a rounded outer section defining the contact surface, the
4 rounded outer section having a curved outer surface with a diameter to fit within the hole
5 of the lock bearing; and

6 the lock bearing comprises a hub having a cylindrical hole, an interior
7 groove with in the hole, and a resilient member defining the engagement member in the
8 groove, the flat section being juxtaposed to the resilient member in the release position
9 and the outer section contacting the resilient member in the lock position.

1 47. The machine of claim 45 wherein:

2 the shaft comprises an elongated member having a flat section defining the
3 release surface and a plurality of truncated annular teeth defining the contact surface; and

4 the lock bearing comprises a hub having a cylindrical hole, a flat portion,
5 and a slot in the flat portion defining the engagement element, the flat section of the shaft
6 being juxtaposed to the flat portion of the lock bearing in the release position and at least
7 one of the annular teeth being in the slot in the lock position.

1 48. A machine for processing microelectronic devices, comprising:

2 a stack of JEDEC trays, each JEDEC tray carrying a plurality of
3 microelectronic devices;

4 a receiving station having a platform with a tray singulator and a mounting
5 element, the tray singulator being configured to selectively separate and retain a single
6 JEDEC tray from the stack of JEDEC trays;

7 a portable tray retainer configured to hold the stack of JEDEC trays, the
8 tray retainer being releasably attached to the receiving station and the tray retainer
9 including a casing and a plurality of retaining elements, wherein the casing includes a
10 guide structure with a first end spaced apart from the receiving station and a second end
11 proximate to the receiving station, a cross-member extending across at least a portion of
12 the guide structure at least proximate to the first end, and an opening at least proximate to
13 the second end through which the JEDEC trays can pass into or out of the casing,
14 wherein the retaining elements are positioned proximate to the opening and are moveable
15 between a storage position and a load/unload position, the retaining elements projecting
16 into the guide structure in the storage position to hold the JEDEC trays in the retainer,
17 and at least a portion of the retaining elements projecting away from the guide structure
18 and engaging a corresponding mounting element of the receiving station in the
19 load/unload position to allow the JEDEC trays to pass through the opening and to
20 releasably hold the retainer to the receiving station, and wherein the cross-member is
21 moveably positioned in the casing to move along a load/unload path to push a bottom tray

22 of the tray stack against the retaining elements when the retaining elements are in the
23 storage position and to drive the bottom tray out of the casing to the singulator when the
24 retaining elements are in the load/unload position; and

25 a processing station that processes microelectronic devices on JEDEC trays
26 that have been unloaded from the retainer.

1 49. A lock/release assembly, comprising:

2 a lock bearing having a hole;

3 an elongated shaft slidably and rotatably received in the hole of the lock
4 bearing, wherein at least one of the lock bearing and the shaft is rotatable between a lock
5 position and a release position; and

6 an engagement assembly having an engagement element, a contact surface
7 and a release surface, the engagement element being coupled to one of the shaft or the
8 lock bearing, and the contact surface and the release surface being on the other of the
9 shaft or the lock bearing, the contact surface being configured to contact the engagement
10 element and prevent axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the lock
11 position, and the release surface being configured to be spaced apart from the engagement
12 element and allow axial movement between the lock bearing and the shaft in the release
13 position.

1 50. The lock/release assembly of claim 49 wherein:

2 the shaft comprises a contoured elongated member having a flat section
3 defining the release surface and a rounded outer section defining the contact surface, the
4 rounded outer section having a curved outer surface with a diameter to fit within the hole
5 of the lock bearing; and

6 the lock bearing comprises a hub having a cylindrical hole, an interior
7 groove with in the hole, and a resilient member defining the engagement member in the
8 groove, the flat section being juxtaposed to the resilient member in the release position
9 and the outer section contacting the resilient member in the lock position.

1 51. The lock/release assembly of claim 49 wherein:
2 the shaft comprises an elongated member having a flat section defining the
3 release surface and a plurality of truncated annular teeth defining the contact surface; and
4 the lock bearing comprises a hub having a cylindrical hole, a flat portion,
5 and a slot in the flat portion defining the engagement element, the flat section of the shaft
6 being juxtaposed to the flat portion of the lock bearing in the release position and at least
7 one of the annular teeth being in the slot in the lock position.

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2 52. A method of storing a tray stack having a plurality of individual trays
3 carrying microelectronic devices, the tray stack having a first exterior tray at one end of
4 the tray stack and a second exterior tray at an opposite end of the tray stack, the method
5 comprising:

6 inserting the tray stack along a load/unload path into a casing of a tray
7 retaining device until the first exterior tray contacts a cross-member of the tray retaining
8 device;

9 restricting the individual trays from moving laterally with respect to the
10 load/unload path; and

11 selectively impeding movement along the load/unload path in a first
12 direction by moving a retaining element attached to the tray retaining device from a
13 load/unload position to a storage position, the retaining element allowing the tray stack to
14 move along the load/unload path in the load/unload position and the retaining element
15 engaging the second exterior tray in the storage position to impede movement of the tray
stack along the load/unload path in a second direction.

1 53. The method of claim 52 wherein inserting the tray stack comprises
2 positioning the retaining element in the load/unload position and sliding the tray stack
3 along the load/unload path and into the casing.

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54. The method of claim 52 wherein inserting the tray stack comprises
2 attaching the tray retaining device to a processing station of a processing machine by
3 positioning the retaining element in the load/unload position in which the retaining
4 element engages a mounting element of the processing station and sliding the tray stack
5 along the load/unload path and into the casing.

55. The method of claim 52 wherein:

2 the cross-member is a floating plate that is moveable along the load/unload
3 path in the casing;

4 inserting the tray stack comprises attaching the tray retaining device to a
5 processing station of a processing machine by positioning the retaining element in the
6 load/unload position in which the retaining element engages a mounting element of the
7 processing station and sliding the tray stack along the load/unload path and into the
8 casing, the floating plate moving in the first direction; and

9 the method further comprises preventing the floating plate from moving
10 when the retaining element is in the storage position and allowing the floating plate to
11 move when the retaining element is in the load/unload position.

56. A method of storing a tray stack having a plurality of individual
2 JEDEC trays carrying microelectronic devices, the tray stack having a first exterior tray at
3 one end of the tray stack and a second exterior tray at an opposite end of the tray stack,
4 the method comprising:

5 providing a portable tray retaining device configured to hold the stack of
6 JEDEC trays, the tray retaining device including a casing, a plurality of retaining
7 elements coupled to the casing and a driving element moveably coupled to the casing,
8 wherein the casing includes a guide structure with a first end and a second end, a cross-
9 member extending across at least a portion of the guide structure at least proximate to the
10 first end, and an opening at least proximate to the second end through which the JEDEC
11 trays can pass into or out of the casing, wherein the retaining elements are moveable

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12 between a storage position and a load/unload position, the retaining elements projecting
13 into the guide structure in the storage position to hold the JEDEC trays in the retainer,
14 and the retaining elements projecting away from the guide structure in the load/unload
15 position to allow the JEDEC trays to pass through the opening, and wherein the cross-
16 member is moveably coupled to the casing to move along a load/unload path to push the
17 tray stack toward the second end of the casing;

18 inserting the tray stack along the load/unload path into the casing; and
19 moving the retaining elements from the load/unload position to the storage
20 position in which the retaining elements engage the second exterior tray and the cross-
21 member engages the first exterior tray to restrict movement of the tray stack along the
22 load/unload path.

23 57. The method of claim 56 wherein inserting the tray stack comprises
24 positioning the retaining element in the load/unload position and sliding the tray stack
25 along the load/unload path and into the casing.

26 58. The method of claim 56 wherein inserting the tray stack comprises
27 attaching the tray retaining device to a processing station of a processing machine by
28 positioning the retaining element in the load/unload position in which the retaining
29 element engages a mounting element of the processing station and sliding the tray stack
30 along the load/unload path and into the casing.

31 59. The method of claim 56 wherein:
32 the cross-member is a floating plate that is moveable along the load/unload
33 path in the casing;

34 inserting the tray stack comprises attaching the tray retaining device to a
35 processing station of a processing machine by positioning the retaining element in the
36 load/unload position in which the retaining element engages a mounting element of the
37 processing station and sliding the tray stack along the load/unload path and into the
38 casing; and

9 the method further comprises preventing the floating plate from moving
10 when the retaining element is in the storage position and allowing the floating plate to
11 move when the retaining element is in the load/unload position.

1 60. A method of processing microelectronic devices in a tray stack
2 having a plurality of individual trays carrying the microelectronic devices, the tray stack
3 having a first exterior tray at one end of the tray stack and a second exterior tray at an
4 opposite end of the tray stack, the method comprising:

5 inserting the tray stack along a load/unload path into a casing of a tray
6 retaining device until the first exterior tray contacts a cross-member of the retaining
7 device, the casing being configured to restrict the individual trays from moving laterally
8 with respect to the load/unload path;

9 moving a retaining element attached to the tray retaining device from a
10 load/unload position to a storage position, the retaining element allowing the tray stack to
11 move along the load/unload path in the load/unload position and the retaining element
12 engaging the second exterior tray in the storage position to restrict movement of the tray
13 stack along the load/unload path;

14 releasably attaching the tray retaining device to the receiving station of the
15 processing machine;

16 releasing the tray stack to move along the load/unload path by moving the
17 retaining element from the storage position to the load/unload position to disengage the
18 retaining element from the second exterior tray of the tray stack; and

19 separating individual trays from the tray stack and processing the
20 microelectronic devices on the individual trays in the processing machine.

1 61. The method of claim 60 wherein releasably attaching the tray
2 retention device to the receiving station occurs when the retaining element moves from
3 the storage position to the load/unload position by engaging the retaining element with a
4 mounting element attached to the processing machine.

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1 62. The method of claim 60 wherein inserting the tray stack comprises
2 positioning the retaining element in the load/unload position and sliding the tray stack
3 along the load/unload path and into the casing.

1 63. The method of claim 60 wherein:
2 the cross-member is a floating plate that is moveable along the load/unload
3 path in the casing; and
4 the method further comprises preventing the floating plate from moving
5 when the retaining element is in the storage position and allowing the floating plate to
6 move when the retaining element is in the load/unload position.

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